

FIRST EXECUTIVE

AFTER 10 YEARS AS SHERIFF, MARK HACKEL GEARS UP FOR NEW ROLE AS MACOMB COUNTY EXECUTIVE



Mark A. Hackel has spent 10 years as sheriff of Macomb County. As of Jan. 1, 2011, he's Macomb County's first county executive. Hackel has been with the sheriff's department since 1981. In an intimate conversation, Ambassador Publisher, Denise Ilitch, asked Hackel about his career, his success, his tough moments, and what makes Macomb County so special.

To what do you attribute your success?

I attribute my success to the people I've been able to surround myself with in my lifetime. As a kid I was introduced to good people and I've carried that with me through my adult life. I've associated myself with good, honest, decent people. The best part of what I do is: I've learned how to identify people with good character, and I've always been drawn to people with good character.

What advice would you give someone who wants to have a career such as you?

I would say surround yourself with people that add value to your life and

what you do. Do what you have a passion for. Don't do what your parents want or what someone else wants you to do. Follow your passion and find a way to keep doing that.

Of what accomplishments are you most proud?

That one's a tough question. Probably, going back to when I was a kid and being the captain of the wrestling team in high school and being first team All-County. That took a lot of hard work and was a pretty big challenge for me. It still stands out in my mind. Being on the wrestling team prepared me for a lot of things in my adult life. It taught me team work, how to win, how to lose, and how to not to worry about failure.

Who is your mentor and why?

I don't know if I've had any one mentor in my life. My father was a significant role model in my life. When we were kids he challenged us to do what was right and taught us to be good to other people. There have been so many people that I've been able to watch or identify with in my life, even from a distance that have been good role models. They might not even realize how they influenced me.

What is the toughest situation you faced, and how did you deal with it?

Probably the adversity dealing with my father's situation (In 2000, Hackel's father, former Macomb County Sheriff, was convicted of two counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct). When that happened, it affected me both professionally and personally. I had to deal with it on so many different levels. Nothing in life prepares you for something like that. That's when I realized who my true friends in life were. They were the ones who stuck around to help me deal with the adversity.

How do you motivate others?

By encouraging them. By participating in what they are doing. By pointing out their successes, and then supporting them in difficult times or when they are going through challenges. People tend to shy away from adversity, I'm one of those people that likes to encourage people to do the right thing. When someone's facing adversity, don't just walk away from them, sit down have a cup of coffee, find out how you can help, ask the tough questions, be a friend.

What was your best career decision?

My best career decision was also the toughest one for me to make, which was to run for Macomb County Sheriff during that tough time in my life. Being sheriff has been the most significant thing in my life during the past 10 years. During this time, I've realized what a terrible decision it would have been not to have run for sheriff. It was a great life lesson about putting your best foot forward and good things will happen. I was amazed that I was elected. I've had an incredible opportunity to be involved in people's lives and make a difference.

What do you think are the key traits of a leader?

Making sure you hold yourself accountable and that you hold those working for you accountable. It's important for a leader to be accessible to those your working with.

After almost 30 years in law enforcement, what is the best advice you can give citizens about how to protect themselves?

By not making everything a routine in their life and being more alert. Also, not being afraid to respond to that sixth sense. That gut feeling that something isn't quite right is correct 99 percent of the time. People need to pay attention to what's going on around them. If it doesn't feel right, react and do something about it. It's simple things, really like when you're walking down the street: pay attention.

You obviously have a passion for Macomb County. Why? Tell our readers what is special about the county of Macomb.

Well, first I was born and raised here. People tend to know each other, sometimes through the strangest connections. I lived in Warren most of my life, and it's amazing how many people know each other. Everybody knows everybody to some extent. And it's kind of laid back, except for the politics. Everyone is uniquely intertwined.

What do you know now that you wish you knew earlier in life?

As a kid, I guess not being afraid of failure. That's the advice I would give to kids: Don't be afraid of failure. Not trying or not challenging yourself is the biggest failure. I wish I would have known that in junior high or high school. And I would tell people not to make those same mistakes as an adult, don't wish your life away. As long as you are making positive, healthy choices, challenge yourself on things you want to try.

It is the highest calling to be a public servant. How did you make that choice?

It all happened by chance. I didn't set out wanting to be a police officer. It was a job opportunity, initially. I took a job as a dispatcher to pay the bills, and it became a passion. I went to school to become a police officer and then fell in love with it. I had the opportunity to run for sheriff. It was a difficult time, but I went for it and ended up loving it. It's a unique job and one that is so difficult to explain to people. It's one of the best jobs in the world. Public service is challenging, but I don't worry about what people think of me. I try not to let things bother me.

What keeps you up at night?

Some of the cases that we've had. The very difficult cases are the ones that involve children. They keep you awake at night.

Do you have a favorite Detroit moment?

My best memories are when I was a kid and I'd go with my dad and grandpa to the old Tiger Stadium at Michigan and Trumbull to watch the football games. That was really special. It was cold, but you brought your own hot chocolate.

This is our auto issue, and it's Valentine's Day, too! What is your favorite car? Best Valentine's Day gift?

A Ford Mustang convertible. Black on black. If anyone wants an idea for a Valentine's Day gift, there you go! 🏠 – Denise Ilitch